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Quarter Ton of Files Fail to Change Varying Views on Kennedy Death

By James R. Dickenson
Washington Star Staff Writer

The 500 pounds of raw files on the John F. Kennedy assassination made public this week by the FBI is, in effect, a quarter of a ton of reinforcing material. There is every reason to believe that the other quarter ton of documents the FBI will release next month will be more of the same.

Whatever beliefs you hold about the murder of President Kennedy, they will be unshaken regardless of how strenuously you examine the bulky files. What these files contain is overwhelming circumstantial evidence that on Nov. 22, 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald alone shot President Kennedy and John B. Connally, then governor of Texas, from the Texas Book Depository, with a 6.5mm Italian rifle.

Those who subscribe to the various conspiracy theories, however, including involvement of the Mafia, pro- and anti-Castro Cubans, or such governmental agencies as the FBI and the CIA, will find nothing in the files to assuage their suspicions.

There is a great deal of emphasis on FBI denials that either Oswald or Jack Ruby, the man who killed Oswald, were ever on the FBI payroll as informants.

THE FILES INDICATE that Oswald's fingerprints were on the brown paper in which the assassination weapon had been carried and which was found in the depository. "A latent fingerprint on the brown bag on the sixth floor was of Oswald's left index finger," the file says. "In addition, one latent palm print on specimen Q10 (the wrapper) was identified as the right palm print of Oswald."

They also indicate that analysis of Oswald's hands indicate that he had fired a weapon that day. A diphenylbenzidine reagent test showed "punctate traces of nitrate and the paraffin on the right and left hands is consistent with that of a person who handled or fired a firearm," the FBI reports say.

A neutron activation analysis also "revealed deposits on the (paraffin) cast characteristic of powder residues. However it is not possible to distinguish the powder residues of the rifle cartridges from that of the revolver cartridges."

This is because a cast had been chemically treated and washed prior to the neutron analysis, the report says.

THE REFERENCE to the revolver involves the Smith and Wesson revolver in Oswald's possession when he was captured in a movie theater shortly after the assassination. The revolver was the weapon with which Dallas police officer J.D. Tippitt was killed less than an hour after Kennedy was shot.

The revolver was sold to a person named A. Hidell and was shipped to a post office box rented by Oswald's mother. Oswald carried a draft card with the name Alex Hidell and his membership card in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee was signed by an A.J. Hidell.

The FBI reports also say that fibers caught in the buttplate matched those of Oswald's shirt. "Included in this tuft of fibers were gray-black, dark blue and orange-yellow cotton fibers which match in microscopic characteristics the gray-black, dark blue and orange-yellow fibers composing the (specimen) Q11 shirt of the suspect," the report says.

Fibers on the brown bag in which the rifle had been wrapped matched the microscopic characteristics of the Q12 blanket, the report continued. This is a reference to the blanket in which Oswald also had wrapped the rifle and which was left on the sixth floor of the depository.

THE BLANKET HAS been identified by the family with which Oswald's Russian-born wife, Marina, was living at the time of the assassination.

"Michael Paine (the head of the family) identified a blanket in possession of Dallas police officers as the same one he had previously seen in said garage," the report says.

Buell Wesley Frazier, a fellow employee at the book depository, drove Oswald to work on the morning of the assassination. Oswald had with him a package in a large department store paper sack which he said were curtain rods, the FBI report says. Frazier states this package was large enough to have accommodated a "broken down" rifle. Upon arrival

at work, Oswald took this package from the car and went into his place of employment while Frazier stayed in car for a short time to recharge his battery.

Frazier said that Oswald told him that Mrs. Ruth Paine had given him some curtain rods, but Mrs. Paine subsequently told the FBI that she knew nothing about any curtain rods.

The FBI report raises a question about the three bullets that the Warren commission, which was appointed by President Johnson to investigate the assassination, ultimately determined were fired at Kennedy.

THE COMMISSION at one point had the opinion that the first shot had struck the then-president in the right shoulder, that the second hit Connally in the right shoulder and came out his chest, then hitting his wrist and penetrating his thigh. The third shot was believed to be the one that killed Kennedy.

The commission subsequently decided that the first shot hit Kennedy and then hit Connally, and that the second shot missed the car entirely. This was because of their inability to find enough fragments to account for three bullets and because of a lack of interior damage to the limousine.

Testimony by Navy doctors who performed the autopsy on Kennedy was that "shot one struck the president high in the right shoulder area penetrating the torso near the base of the neck damaging the flesh of the throat but not tearing the throat wall." This bullet, according to the doctors, continued and entered Connally's right shoulder, emerging below the right nipple. The bullet, the doctors reported, then apparently was snagged in clothing, eventually falling out on Connally's stretcher.

"Shot two struck the wrist of the governor continuing on into his thigh.

"SHOT THREE STRUCK the right side of the president's head, carrying much bone and brain tissue away, leaving a large cavity. There is nothing controversial about where shot three occurred inasmuch as the Zapruder movie indicates with much clarity where this happened."

One of the most intense controversies surrounding the assassination is the belief that Oswald could not possibly have fired three accurately aimed shots with a bolt-action rifle, even though he had a telescopic sight, in the five-second time period indicated by the Zapruder movie and by witnesses.

The FBI files indicate that marksmen using Oswald's rifle were able to fire three well-aimed shots in that time and the exhibits have a chart indicating that, even with an aiming error of one millimeter, the chances of hitting a target as large as the head and shoulders of a human being are 100 percent up to 270 feet. The estimated distance at the time of the shots was 90 feet.

The firing tests indicated that the telescopic sight was off and that the rifle would fire slightly high. Witness told the Warren Commission that an assassin would aim at the upper torso rather than at the head to have a better chance of hitting the target and that this might account for the fact that Kennedy was hit in the head.

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS point to the fact that the Zapruder movies show that Kennedy's head was driven forward by the force of the fatal shot and then snapped violently backward. They cite this as evidence that other gunmen hit him from the front, firing from the grassy knoll on which some witnesses contended they saw shadows and silhouettes of possible gunmen and puffs of smoke as from rifle shots.

Ballistic tests on human skulls filled with gelatin show that the skulls move forward under initial impact but that the jet effect of the material blown out the front of the skull causes it to snap back.

The FBI files have nothing on these theories that Oswald acted in conjunction with other assassins. The late J. Edgar Hoover entertained the possibility of some sort of conspiracy immediately after the assassination but by the end of the day concluded that Oswald was the assassin and that he had acted alone.

The FBI files contained other, inconclusive, evidence against Oswald. One witness, Howard L. Brennan, a steamfitter, was on his lunch break and seated across the street from the book depository. He looked up in time to see the assassin on the sixth floor take dead aim at Kennedy's car and fire the final shot. He

had heard the first two, he said. Brennan described the rifleman as a white male in his early thirties wearing light colored clothes "in the khaki line."

BRENNAN LATER picked Oswald out of a police lineup as a person who resembled the man he had seen in the window. He was not able to make a positive identification, however.

Another witness, James Richard Worrell, saw the rifleman fire the shots and a few minutes later saw a man running from the depository building. When he saw the film clips of Oswald on television that evening he thought Oswald was the man he had seen.

There is other circumstantial evidence. Officials of the Texas Employment Commission told the FBI that Oswald had been contacted several times in the two months prior to the assassination and was referred to a better paying job than the one he had in the depository, but that he refused it.

For many people, however, circumstantial evidence that a neurotic and maladjusted young man acting alone could commit such a crime is not convincing. Many people want conclusive evidence in such cases but, like the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and other historic murders, there will always be profound and unanswered questions.